Because It was in Danger of Extinction

By VERA SCOTT

TRILLIUM protected BY LAW

—Islander Photo by Cecil Clark

ON January 23, 1948, the day of the opening of the provincial legislature, an act to amend "The Dogwood and Rhododendron Protection Act" was presented as the first bill of the season. The official explanation reads, "This amendment is designed to provide the same protection for trillium plants as that now provided for dogwood and rhododendron."

In plain language this means that no person shall pick, cut down, dig, pull up, or knowingly injure or destroy in part, or in whole, whether in bloom or not, a dogwood, rhododendron, or trillium on the land of any private owner, without the consent of the private owner first being obtained, or on land belonging to the Crown in right of the province or to a municipality. Any person who contravenes any provision of this act shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine.

The decision to include trillium in the act undoubtedly pleased many people. Many other people are still unaware that the act exists, and still others question why trillium was chosen when such species as dog-toothed violent and calypso were omitted if not forgotten.

Many wild flowers in British Columbia, especially in populated places, have been and are being destroyed. Of these, trillium more than others faces the danger of extinction. This is because it is impossible to pick trillium flowers without also removing the leaves and stem. The result is that damage is done to the next year's bud, which is likely to die through lack of food reserve produced by the leaves and stored in the root stalk (rhizome). Masses of trilliums are unknowingly destroyed every year by people who love wild flowers.

This is the main reason for the provincial government's decision to give the trillium sanctuary and to save it from extinction for generations to come. Wild flowers like dog-toothed violets and calypso are picked and destroyed as well, but they are not in immediate danger as they are either more plentiful or stand a better chance of recovery.

Trillium is so different from other plants, so delightful and striking, that once seen it will always be remembered. The flowering season is from mid-April to the end of May.

Many of us are familiar with this beautiful plant of moist woods. The single stem bears a whorl of three exactly similar green leaves. At its very summit, in the centre of the whorl is a single large and showy stalked flower. As the scientific name trillium ovatum, and one of its common names, Trinity Lily implies, not only the leaves but also the sepals and petals are in threes. The petals are first pure white but turn a dark rose color with age. Sensitive to light, the flowers all face in one direction, following the sun in its course across the sky. This is most noticeable when several of them are found growing together in a colony.

As well as being called Trinity Lily, the Trillium has other popular names. Among the most common are White Lily and Wake Robin. The name of Wake Robin originated in eastern North America where several species of Trillium grow, because its blooming period coincides there with the time the robins return from the south after the winter. The name is not true here as we have robins all winter long. It has been suggested that we should avoid the name Wake Robin and call the plant Western Trillium instead. Western, because our trillium grows only in the west.

In British Columbia the Trillium occurs on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the coastal forest zone. It is to be seen occasionally in the Kootenays, and a few other places in the interior, such as Creston, Fernie and their vicinities.

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IN BEACON HILL PARK, near the Emily Carr Bridge, there are a native dogwood tree and a clump of rhododendron which form a memorial to the late Elizabeth C. Mackenzie, a noted conservationist.

The memorial was placed there in 1950 by the Society for the Preservation of Native Plants of B.C. and the Local Council of Women. This spring the Greater Victoria Natural History Society will add trillium roots to the planting and unveil a bronze plaque in Mrs. Mackenzie's honor.

Elizabeth Mackenzie was born in Folkstone, England, in 1874 and came to Victoria with her husband and family in 1922. She lived for a time in the interior of British Columbia where she learned to love the vast forests and rugged mountains which surrounded her home.

After settling in Victoria, Mrs. Mackenzie became associated with the Alpine Society and in 1929 she was made an honorary member of the organization. It was at this time that she started her famous collection of mosses and lycopodiums, which is now a prized possension of the University of Indiana. In her collecting trips on Vancouver Island she observed the effects of wasteful logging practices and was struck by the apparent indifference of the public to the preservation of the natural beauty of the countryside. With a thoroughness that characterized everything she did, she began to study the subject of conservation.

Her active work as a conservationist began when she was made convener of natural resources in the Local Council of Women. She joined the Society for the Preservation of Native Plants (now disbanded) and in 1936 she became its president.

In 1936 many people, including a number of prominent politicians, still believed in the dangerous theory that B.C. forests were inexhaustible. E. C. Manning, then chief forester, took it upon himself and his staff to inform the public of the true state of affairs, namely, that we were overcutting our best stands of timber and that only drastic changes in forestry practice could assure adequate financial returns in the future. This was what Mrs. Mackenzie had long been preaching. She invited Mr. Manning to address a group of representative citizens at the home of Miss Sara Spencer, and the educational campaign was off to a good start.

Elizabeth Mackenzie's interest in conservation did not confine itself to the protection of forests. All the beauty of nature was her concern. She realized that increased industrialization and urbanization were bound to come to this province and she recommended that, before it was too late, oases of natural parkland should be set aside and preserved in both town and country. She was particularly concerned about the preservation of public sections of lake shore and seashore. She believed that the safety of highways could be maintained without destroying all plant growth along the roadside. She opposed what she believed to be unnecessary cutting of ornamental trees on city property and strove to keep miniature golf and other space-consuming amusements out of Beacon Hill Park.

Mrs. Mackenzie's greatest concern as that children should be taught the value of conservation. Through the co-operation of the Victoria and Saanich School Boards, lectures and nature talks were given in a number of schools. Prizes were offered for posters and nature books, and the assistance of the provincial museum was obtained for exhibiting the children's work to the public.

Before Mrs. Mackenzie became president of the Society for the Preservation of Native Plants, that organization was instrumental in having a law passed to protect the native dogwood. In 1947, when a new highway was being constructed through Manning Park, where there was a heavy growth of wild rhododendron, the society petitioned the government to protect the rhododendron. This was done and the beautiful shrubs along the new highway were saved from mutilation.

In 1958, nine years after Mrs. Mackenzie's death, the mative trillium was added to the list of flowering plants protected by law.